

Our Little Castaway Army in the Arctic

The First Adequate Account of What Happened to the American Forces at Archangel, Realm of Darkness and Eternal Winter

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BOMBARDED by ammunition marked "Made in U. S. A.," unable to find out why it was there, the little army of Americans stationed in North Russia was on the point of mutiny. And yet the report that actual mutiny occurred was absolutely false. The soldier stood true to his colors.

What really took place was this: The armistice had been signed for several months and the morale of the entire Allied troops in Russia was rather low. The men were there but did not know what they were fighting for. Suddenly the British, French and Russian (anti-Bolshevik) troops refused to go to the front to engage with the Reds. We were ordered to take their places. On March 31 our men suddenly asked why they had to take over the front of the associate armies, after they had been in the front line trenches all the time. The men were mostly foreigners, who, prior to their induction into the army, had worked in the automobile factories of Detroit.

Colonel E. W. Stewart, the commander of the regiment, addressed the men and was asked why the Americans were there and why they had to fight the Bolsheviks when their country was not actually engaged in war against Russia.

"I don't know why we are here," the colonel said. "I have as much information regarding this expedition from the War Department as you have; in other words, none. All I know is that we are here and that we are in great danger of being driven into the sea. All the reason for the continuance of the fighting I can give you is that we are fighting for our very lives. It's either choosing between fighting the Bolsheviks, or being driven into the sea. Is that answer enough for you?"

The men said it was enough for them, for they fully realized the colonel's explanation. That was all there was to that mutiny affair.

United States history will have no page in it like the story of the campaign of the American forces in North Russia. In that vast arctic land of ice and snow and forest and swamp, suffering hardships almost unbelievable, a small force of American soldiers, scattered over 50,000 square miles of Russia, battled for their lives against the hordes of Bolsheviks who had threatened and were determined to drive them into the frozen White Sea. For two months before and nearly seven months after the signing of the armistice they fought. Why, they did not know, except for self-preservation, the first law of man.

I am convinced beyond a reasonable doubt, after reading newspaper and magazine reports of the American North Russian expedition before its withdrawal, that editors, politicians, the War College and the people in general are generally in need of a brushing-up course in geography. While in Russia we received a few newspapers and magazines and were amused to read about the American troops near Archangel, "in Siberia," with Siberia 3,000 miles away! We smiled when we learned from these same newspapers that the American troops on the "Murmansk coast" did so and so, when we never had any American troops within 300 miles of the Murman coast until the late spring of 1919, when two companies of American engineers were sent to Murmansk from France to keep the railroad in condition "to expedite and assure the immediate withdrawal of the American troops," who never were within 300 miles of that place and who couldn't possibly have got to that railroad to be taken out! And this was after the newspaper agitation in the United States.

False Reports

With such foggy and erroneous ideas, no wonder the stories brought home by the wounded men and those that leaked through the English censors assumed at times proportions in excess of the real truth. If you think this strange, what would you say if I told you that perhaps the War Department was also confused; that from all indications it did not even know where the American troops were in Russia. If so, why should they send officers to report to the 339th Infantry and instruct them to join that organization "via Vladivostok," and instruct parents to cable their sons in that organization "via Vladivostok"? And why did they send those two companies of engineers to Murmansk?

The American troops in Russia comprised the following units: The 339th Infantry (Detroit's Own), the 337th Ambulance Company, the 337th Field Hospital Company, and one battalion of the 310th Engineers, approximately 5,000 troops. All were originally a part of the 86th Division, which trained at Camp Custer, Michigan. We left

habitation. When we arrived it was flooded with some 75,000 refugees, who had already tired of Bolshevik tyranny or had been driven from their homes by that lawless band. Business practically had ceased. A few shops were open but offered scarcely anything for sale. There was no food except fish or fish products. Ten pounds of sugar or a sack of flour would buy a silver fox fur worth \$500 in the United States. But the question was where to get the sugar or flour.

The people virtually were starving—living mostly on fish, black straw bread and tea. There was no coin money. Paper money of the wall paper variety and multitudinous makes, from old Nicholi prints and Kerensky issues to the provincial greenback of Archangel, was plentiful, but it would buy nothing, as there was nothing to buy. A ruble was worth about ten cents. There was no work of any kind going on and all the people had to do was to walk the streets and figure out some way to stop or start a revolution.

The country surrounding Archangel is one vast expanse of forest and swamp—and swamp of the variety that sucked up those lost legions of Russia in the Manchurian lakes region in the early days of the war. Except along the streams, the country was very sparsely populated. Here and there one finds small clearing, inhabited by a few wood cutters or trappers or a few peasants. It is indeed a forest primeval, with untapped treasures beyond the dreams of man.

Didn't Warm Up

Rumors were rampant that the Allies were in Russia to get a slice of it; to enforce payment of loans made by the Allies to the old imperial government. The Allies had stated that they did not intend to bother the government in any way; that they were there only to assist it and not to meddle in local affairs. The words were barely spoken when they proceeded to establish martial law and to regulate governmental, private and personal affairs. Naturally, the Russians—"the ignorant Russians"—didn't warm up to the British or the Allies as they were supposed to do. The British were "running the show," as the saying goes, and, as the Americans were directly under the British command, naturally the Russians also mistrusted the Americans. And so the Russians didn't spring to arms—no, they simply didn't spring to arms.

With these explanations you will realize that if the Bolsheviks were to be kept out of the Archangel district and our original mission carried out the Americans were going to have to jump right into the fight, and do it quickly—and that's about the way the British high command had it figured out.

When about half way to Archangel from Newcastle an influenza epidemic broke out among the American troops. From thirty to fifty men in each company were seriously ill when the boats pulled into Archangel. There were no hospitals available. The men were taken off the ships into hastily improvised hospitals, and in some instances had to sleep on bare floors with insufficient blankets. Some six-

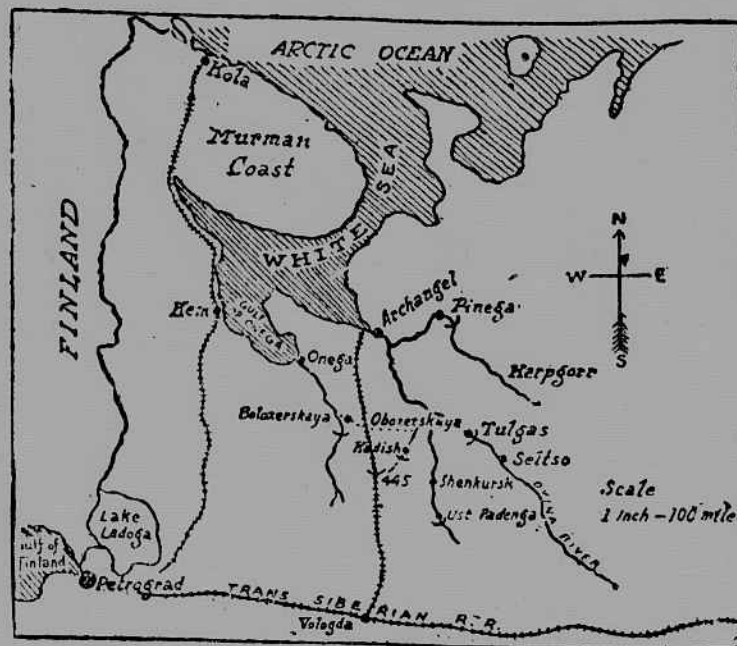
ty or seventy died during the first couple of weeks in September. In England all American rifles and automatic weapons and grenade equipment were taken away from the American troops, and they were armed solely with the Russian rifle, made by an American firm, and which, the boys said, "would shoot around a corner." These rifles were far inferior to the American or English Enfields, and the men had little confidence in them. They jammed and broke and were inaccurate. There was not much boasting about such American-made equipment, and no doubt the word "profiteer" floated across the minds of the users more than once during the trying months that followed.

When we arrived in Russia this rifle was all we had to fight with, while the enemy was equipped with all the weapons a modern army usually has.

No Fighting Mood
With this equipment, and weakened by the influenza epidemic, the American troops were sent out to fight—not with a month's training, or a week's rest, or even a day's respite, but loaded directly from the boats onto boxcars and barges and shipped to the front. And many of those boys had been drafted the middle of June, 1918, and had spent one month of their short army careers on the high seas!

My battalion, the 3d, was the first to embark. We were loaded on a train of small Russian boxcars that were waiting on the dock, bumped along all night, and at dawn the next morning we took over the railroad front from the French, who had just captured and were occupying Obozerskaya. My company pushed ahead and established a front line about six versts (a verst is about two-thirds of a mile) south of Obozerskaya. Three days later we had our first fight with the Bolsheviks.

The first battalion was dispatched down the Dvina and Vaga rivers, while Company H was hurried to Onga and immediately started south. On September 24, 1918, they



This map shows the Allied fronts in North Russia—a land where the sun is visible only a few hours each day. On this dark and frozen waste the American forces, brave and loyal all through, fought on desperately against superior forces, without knowing why they were fighting, apparently deserted by their own people.

met and defeated the enemy at Chukuevo.

Later, in November, a company was sent to Pinega. With about 300 Russian partisans they advanced about eighty versts southeast to Kargopol, but were forced to retreat later to Pelegora, just a short way from Pinega.

Thus six fronts were established, forming a semicircle around Archangel with a circumference of about 500 miles and a radius of from 150 to 400 miles. The country between these fronts was all forest and swamp, and was protected only by isolated posts wherever a trail cut through the woods. Some of these posts were located thirty miles in the deep woods.

Locate these fronts on your map, as I shall refer to them later as follows: Onga, Railroad, Kadish, Vaga, Dvina, Pinega.

Besides the Americans on these fronts there were Russians, French, Polish, British and Canadian troops in small numbers. The total troops on all fronts in Russia at this time did not exceed 8,000, with possibly 2,000 more at the bases and on the service of supply. In October 2,000 British reinforcements arrived, coming some 400 miles across country from Murmansk with reindeer teams.

On the Onga front, at the time the armistice was signed with Germany, we had advanced as far south as Kyavenga, fifty versts south of Onga, and had had several engagements with the enemy, the most important being at Chukuevo, where H company repulsed a heavy counter attack, being outnumbered ten to one.

The American soldiers were able to realize that troops with self-control and confidence in their superior officers, and in their arms have nothing to fear from the enemy, even if he be three times superior in number. The Bolsheviks were able to realize that Americans are capable of inflicting on them a severe lesson, which they will remember.

On the Kadish front, during this period, some of the most severe and gruelling fighting took place. The

hardships were most extreme owing to the rainy weather, the lack of supplies and the lack of shelter of any kind. The men lived continually in the woods and swamp, and were always wet, cold and hungry.

Forging Ahead

The Yanks on the Vaga front had penetrated Russia further than at any other point, and had reached Tooharinskaya, fifty versts south of Shenkursk. The more important engagements were at Gora on September 21, where, after seven hours of intense fighting, the enemy was driven from the town and the Yanks took possession, and at Ust Puyoi on October 7. At the latter place the Americans captured the town after a hard day's battle.

On the Dvina front, after several engagements, the Bolsheviks had been pushed back to Pushega. Here they received reinforcements and began a series of offensives, finally forcing the Americans and Scots to evacuate Pushega and the territory back to Selso. At this place a determined stand was made, but the Bolsheviks brought up their long range guns on barges, and by out-ranging the Allied artillery made Selso so hot that the Allies were forced to evacuate, and they fell back to Tulgas, where a strong position had been prepared and where the front was when the famous meeting was held at Spa.

The Pinega front had not been established up to this time.

The signing of the armistice meant nothing in the young lives of the Yanks fighting on the north Russia fronts. Of course, it was expected that the badly needed reinforcements would be sent at once, and now that the great war was over, that we would be withdrawn at once, as our mission was gone. But neither of these things happened. We waited for some word from home; some definite policy from our government telling us when we were to be withdrawn, or if we were not to be withdrawn, then why we were to continue to fight. None came. There was no armistice celebration.

Conscript Russian Males

The provincial government of Archangel, assisted by the British, conscripted all males between eighteen and forty-five years of age and began to organize an army. Wherever American troops were stationed they trained and equipped the Russian partisans. But at the same time the Bolsheviks were getting better organized and disciplined and stronger.

Winter, Arctic winter, with its long days and nights of darkness, its snow and biting cold, swooped down upon the land. It was useless to try and proceed further without aid, and the policy became to hold what had been taken until reinforcements should come and to let the troops under some kind of shelter to combat the rigors of the climate.

The Bolsheviks had asserted that when winter came they would drive us into the White Sea—and they might have carried out their boast. At least they did make several efforts, which at times assumed rather

Bombarded by Ammunition With U. S. Stamp, Commanded by the British, Doughboys Yet Refuse to Mutiny—Only Ask, Why?

alarming and discouraging proportions.

Behind our lines the Russians were slowly organizing, but were uninspired. There were Bolsheviks in their ranks, and they refused to go to the front. With the exception of the battalion of English which came overland from Murmansk in November and December, no reinforcements arrived.

To shorten our line on account of the shortage of men, and to relieve the pressure on the Kadish front, a general offensive on all fronts was planned for December 31. On December 30, the day before the attack was to commence, some Russians, who were on the railroad front, deserted to the enemy and gave away the entire plans, and before zero hour the next morning the Bolsheviks were pounding all fronts with everything they had.

The Bolsheviks next began their attempt to make good their threat to drive us into the White Sea.

For some time they had been receiving reinforcements, and they concentrated them on the Vaga front. From December 10 to January 19 there were constant front-line actions, although they did not assume the proportions of a general attack. Then they launched a heavy attack against Ust Padenga, about forty versts south of Shenkursk. Armed with automatic rifles and wearing skiis, and dressed in white suits to blend with the snow, they came in waves. Time and again they made assaults upon the positions defending the town, but each time the Americans poured their streams of lead into them and beat them back. One platoon of Company A was wiped out at this place.

When the Bolsheviks saw they were not going to be able to take Ust Padenga without sacrificing a great many more men, they proceeded to slip around and occupy all the villages near Shenkursk and in the rear of Ust Padenga. The Americans did not have sufficient men to hold their line of communication against the hordes of the enemy, so the line was slowly drawn back to Shenkursk, the base.

The Bombardment
By this time the Bolsheviks were pounding Shenkursk with artillery from all sides. They had it surrounded and patrols reported that they also had all the roads blocked. Leaving all stores and equipment, and taking only the wounded, the Americans and refugees, under cover of darkness, slipped out of town into the woods, and taking the winter trail, reached Shegovari, forty-four versts away. So skillfully and quietly was the retreat executed that the Bolsheviks did not know at the time that the Yanks were leaving, and kept pounding the town long after the last man had left. But when they did discover that the Americans had slipped out of their trap they gave quick pursuit, and within two hours after the Americans reached Shegovari they had brought up their heavy guns on sleighs and were bombarding the town. The Yanks held out here for three days, then retreated to Vistovkia, twenty-four versts further north. Vistovkia was held until reduced by enemy artillery, and as there was no advantage in holding the place a withdrawal was executed to Mal Beresnik, some seventeen versts further north, where a position had been prepared and where the Bolsheviks were finally stopped.

For 130 versts, or eighty miles, 350 men held off between 5,000 and 6,000 of the enemy. The suffering, though, was intense and the losses heavy, but the outfit was saved from capture or annihilation.

In March and April the Bolsheviks massed their forces on the railroad front and began what was to be their master stroke. They planned to capture Obozerskaya, the base, and cut off the entire force. The last of March they captured Bolozerskaya, eighteen versts west of Obozerskaya, and cut the line of communication to Onga. The French garrison defending the town were either all killed, wounded or captured. Then the Bolsheviks dragged up

their guns on sleighs and hurriedly brought up 3,000 more fresh troops. The Allies tried to dislodge them, but failed. On March 31 they began a general offensive. Company M, defending Obozerskaya, administered a crushing defeat to them at Bolozerskaya, although they had cut the line of communication back of the force and captured some convoys, and had the whole force cut off. Why they didn't continue on and take Obozerskaya will always be a mystery, for there was no one between themselves and the town to stop them.

Bolshevik Downfall

After this series of defeats they withdrew their forces into Bolozerskaya, and later, in the month of April, just as the snow was beginning to melt, they were forced to evacuate it while the roads were still passable.

At Pinega all attacks had been repulsed and the Russians had been organized and had taken over the front.

Having been defeated on all fronts, the Bolsheviks seemed content to take it easy, and the Americans were in no engagements after May 1. By this time some thirty companies of Russians had been organized and a brigade of British troops had arrived, and the American troops were relieved during the month of May. Thus ended nine months of guerrilla warfare for the Americans—nine months of constant fighting and hardships—and the respite, so long looked for, was at hand.

Of course, this is only a generalization of the operations. Space does not permit a detailed description of the minor engagements, or even a mention, though each had its individual significance to the whole campaign.

While speaking of the campaign I wish to say a few words for the 310th Engineers. They were scattered everywhere over this vast northern front. They built block-houses and bridges and barracks. They dug trenches and strung barbed wire; they repaired engines and operated sawmills; they were on all fronts, doing a hundred and one odd jobs to help out the infantry. Yes, and they fought, too—dropped their tools as they had done at Cambrai, in France, and fought with rifle side by side with the doughboy.

American Losses Light

An unofficial report of losses, taken from the May 31 number of "The American Sentinel," a newspaper published in Archangel by the Red Cross for the benefit of American troops in North Russia, stated that the casualties of killed, wounded, died of disease and other causes, and prisoners, was 20 officers and 545 men. This list was published before a complete return of casualties was in, and the figures do not include men incapacitated from duty or invalided home as a direct result of campaign or campaign conditions, such as shell shock, rheumatism, frozen and trench feet, dysentery, etc. A conservative estimate of such cases would be from 300 to 450.

As I have stated before, the British were in complete charge of the North Russian expedition and everything pertaining to it. Great Britain furnished all of the food, ammunition, equipment and supplies—in fact everything. The United States did not even ration its own troops. In the beginning of the campaign the British had few fighting troops in North Russia, but they did have a great many officers and non-commissioned. Americans everywhere were under the command of British.

Even in the Arctic Circle the Yanks never had any kick coming about clothing. There was plenty of it, and where there was suffering it was more on account of the lack of transport than of supply. The clothing was designed by Sir Ernest Shackleton, the Antarctic explorer, and consisted of the Shackleton boot, heavy fur coats and caps, lumberman's socks, leather vests, mitts, snow goggles, sleeping bags, skiis, snowshoes, muffers, sweaters, etc.

The worst thing we had to con-

The Very First League of Nations

THE Book of Books is what the name of "Bible" implies. In it can be found anything. It is source, effect and result, combined. But who would have surmised that in it is the fundamental and historical idea of a league of nations? And we wonder how such an ideal can be clumsily, yet nevertheless perfectly, expressed. Our wonder is only as great as our intelligence of Biblical language is limited, which is to say that we are hesitant to read when the reading is prosaic. This was a flimsy obstacle, however, for the person who likes to dig and see what cometh forth.

Biblically, then, here is the first league of nations—Chapter IX of the Book of Joshua:

"And it came to pass, when all the kings which were on this side Jordan, in the hills, and in the valleys, and in all the coast of the great sea over against Lebanon, the Hittite, and the Amorite, the Canaanite, the Perizite, the Hivite, and the Jebusite, heard thereof, that they gathered themselves together to fight with Joshua and with Israel, with one accord. And when the inhabitants of Gibeon heard what

Joshua had done unto Jericho and to Ai, they did work wily, and went and made as if they had been ambassadors, and took old sacks upon their asses, and wine bottles, old and rent, and bound up, and old shoes and clouted upon their feet, and old garments upon them; and all the bread of their provision was dry and mouldy, and went to Joshua unto the camp at Gilgal, and said unto men of Israel, We be come from a far country; now therefore make ye a league with us.

"And the men of Israel said unto the Hivites, Peradventure ye dwell among us; and how shall we make a league with you? and they said unto Joshua, We are thy servants. And Joshua said unto them, Who are ye, and from whence come ye?"

"And they said unto him, From a very far country thy servants are come because of the name of the Lord thy God, for we have heard the fame of him, and all that he did in Egypt, and all that he did to the two kings of the Amorites, that were beyond Jordan, to Sihon king of Heshbun, and to Og king of Bashan, which was at Ashtaroth. Wherefore our elders and all the inhabitants of our country spake to us, saying, Take your victuals with you for the journey, and go to meet them, and say unto them, We are your ser-

vants; and therefore now make ye a league with us. This is our bread we took for our provision out of our houses on the day we came forth to go unto you; but now, behold, it is dry, and it is mouldy: And these bottles of wine, which we filled, were new; and behold, they be rent; and these our garments and our shoes are become old by reason of the very long journey.

"And the men took of their victuals and asked not counsel at the mouth of the Lord. And Joshua made peace with them, and made a league with them, to let them live, and the princes of the congregation sware unto them.

And it came to pass at the end of three days after they had made a league with them, that they heard that they were their neighbors, and that they dwelt among them, and the children of Israel journeyed, and came unto their cities on the third day. Now their cities were Gibeon and Chephirah, and Beeroth, and Kirjath-jearim. And the children of Israel smote them not, because the princes of the congregation had sworn unto them by the Lord God of Israel. And all the congregation murmured against the princes.

"But all the princes said unto all the congregation, We have sworn unto them by the Lord God of Israel; now therefore we may not touch them. This we will do to them, we will even let

them live, lest wrath be upon us, because of the oath which we sware unto them. And the princes said unto them, Let them live; but let them be hewers of wood and drawers of water unto all of the congregation; as the princes had promised them. And Joshua called for them, and spake unto them saying: Wherefore have ye beguiled us, saying, We are very far from you; when you dwell among us? Now therefore you are cursed and shall there none of you be freed from being bondsmen and the hewers of wood and the drawers of water for the house of my God.

"And they answered Joshua, and said, Because it was certainly told thy servants, how the Lord thy God commanded his servant Moses to give you all the land, and to destroy all the inhabitants of the land from before you, therefore we were sore afraid of our lives because of you, and have done this thing. And now, behold, we are in thine hand; as it seemeth good and right unto thee to do unto us, do. And so did he unto them, and delivered them out of the hand of the children of Israel, that they slew them not. And Joshua made them that day hewers of wood and drawers of water for the congregation, and for the altar of the Lord, even unto this day, in the place which he should choose."

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